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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT OF SPAIN 001105

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SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR WHA/CAR and INR/IAA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TD](#)

SUBJECT: Elections: And the Winner is...

REF: (A) Port of Spain 1030, (B) Port of Spain 1047, (C) Port of Spain 1077 (D) Port of Spain 1079 (E) Port of Spain 1090

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED; PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY.

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The ruling People's National Movement (PNM), the United National Congress (UNC) and the Congress of the People (COP) are campaigning feverishly, especially for marginal seats, in advance of the November 5 elections. Major rallies will be held November 3 (the Rev. Jesse Jackson reportedly is the UNC headline speaker), with campaigns essentially shutting down on Sunday in advance of Monday's vote. The race remains unpredictable given poor and biased polling, the number of closely contested seats, the COP wild card, and the fact that opposition adherents - albeit split between two parties - probably outnumber PNM supporters. Our best guess in an election that even local pundits are loath to predict is a PNM majority, perhaps in the mid-twenties, but below the 31 seats needed to change the constitution. Unless the race is exceedingly close, the wait to see who will grab the reins of power will not be long. Unofficial results are expected by 11:00 p.m. local time on Election Day. The new (or old) Prime Minister should be officially named late the week of November 5 or early the following week. END SUMMARY.

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Who Will Win  
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12. (SBU) Going into the final weekend of campaigning, PNM officials are publicly and privately confident. The party's optimism is based on the large crowds it is drawing, problems in the split opposition, and its own internal polls. We have been told by a senior party official that the PNM will win at least 26 seats. A well-connected government official predicted low- to mid-20 seats to us and, despite his deep dislike of the UNC, he felt it would form the official opposition. This official believes the COP will be lucky to get 2 or 3 seats as many of its supporters are returning to the UNC fold based on the perception that the new party is losing steam and cannot win.

13. (SBU) Local political analysts are hesitant to make a prediction, but the consensus of those we have spoken with is that the PNM has 15 safe seats with an additional 9 marginal seats leaning its way; the UNC has 11 safe seats with leads in 3 marginal seats; and the COP may not win anything although they are competitive in the race for 3 marginal seats. PM Patrick Manning and UNC leader Basdeo Panday have comfortable leads in their races to return to parliament; COP leader Winston Dookeran looks like a long-shot to win his race. UNC hopes rest on an anti-Manning wave that draws votes from the COP and gives it a near sweep of marginal seats, allowing it to squeak through to victory. For its part, the COP is hoping that revulsion among some over UNC antics and corruption allegations swing the tide it was riding earlier in the

race back to it.

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The Logistics of What is to Come  
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¶4. (SBU) On Monday, 993,479 registered voters will be eligible to cast their ballots beginning at 6:00 am. Voting to choose among the 130 candidates will continue at 2,046 polling stations in the 41 constituencies (districts) until 6:00 p.m. local time. Each polling station will count the ballots before submitting the results to the Elections and Boundaries Commission. According to a conversation with an editor of the local newspaper Newsday, there will be constant TV and radio reporting throughout the day. He expects unofficial results by 11:00 p.m. The official results will be announced two or three days later. In the past, there have always been requests for re-counts of swing seats; this would cause a delay in announcing the official results.

¶5. (SBU) Based on precedent, not law, the Prime Minister is named by the President three days after official results are declared. There also is no constitutional provision as to how soon the Cabinet should be selected. In the past, this has been done one or two weeks after the announcement of the election results, though some expect a much shorter time frame if the PNM again emerges victorious and if few recounts are requested. Shortly after the naming of the cabinet, perhaps within a couple of weeks, Parliament will meet in a short session largely to organize itself.

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Comment: An Important Vote  
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¶6. (SBU) This election is an important one for the citizens of

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Trinidad and Tobago. Their country is a leader in the eastern Caribbean, CARICOM, and the economic powerhouse of, and energy security guarantor for, the region. Whoever wins on November 5 will inherit a government flush with oil and gas revenues that can plausibly - as the current government has said is its goal - achieve developed nation status by the year 2020. To get there, though, there are many hurdles to overcome and missteps are possible.

¶7. (SBU) The outcome also is important to the United States. Trinidad, just off the coast of Venezuela, provides two-thirds of our LNG imports and roughly half our ammonia and methanol imports. It also is an active partner in the anti-drug and anti-terrorism battles. Importantly as well, as host of the 2009 Summit of the Americas, the next government will play a large role in shaping that key hemispheric event. We expect any of the three parties, should they emerge victorious, will be friendly and cooperative with us and maintain market-oriented economic development and sound macroeconomic policies, though both the COP and UNC have advocated slowing the pace of the current government's natural gas-based industrialization program.

AUSTIN